

Trinidad and Tobago

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Freedom of the Press

Freedom of the press is enshrined in the constitution and is generally respected in practice. In 2013, the government indicated that it would be moving to amend the Libel and Defamation Act to exempt journalists from criminal libel. Although the cabinet approved a bill that would partially decriminalize defamation in May 2013, it had not passed by year's end. Unlike in 2012, however, there were no suits brought against journalists for libel in 2013. In December 2012, the Trinidad and Tobago Publishers and Broadcasters Association announced that it had reached an agreement with the attorney general to amend the 2011 Data Protection Act, a privacy law that partially came into force in 2012, to create an exemption for investigative journalism.

While freedom of information legislation is in place, the government has been criticized for gradually narrowing the categories of public information that are available under the law. In October 2012, national security minister Jack Warner announced that the media would be denied access to the government's crime statistics so that news outlets and the opposition could not sensationalize the data, which, he argued, could lead to more crime.

Instances of attempted political influence on news content occur occasionally. In March 2013, Prime Minister Kamla Persad-Bissessar publicly criticized the media for its negative coverage of the government during a speech she was delivering to supporters of the ruling United National Congress (UNC). Media practitioners interpreted these comments as an effort to intimidate the private press and to silence criticism of the government. In July, three senior journalists at the *Trinidad Guardian* resigned in protest of government interference in the publication's editorial policy.

There were no reports of physical attacks on journalists in 2013. However, the government allegedly waged a smear campaign in November against two female journalists, following the publication of a series of investigative articles they had written for the *Trinidad Guardian* and the *Trinidad Express* regarding the activities of Warner and Attorney General Anand Ramlogan.

There are three daily newspapers—*Trinidad Express*, *Newsday*, and the *Trinidad Guardian*—and three political weeklies, all of which are privately owned. Four television stations are in operation, including the state-owned Caribbean New Media Group (CNMG) though the privately owned TV6 dominates ratings. There are about a dozen radio stations, including three operated by CNMG. There were no government restrictions on the internet, which was accessed by nearly 64 percent of the population in 2013.

The government and state-owned businesses disproportionately place their advertising with state-owned media and private outlets that favor the government. In 2012, Communications Minister Jamal Mohammed announced a new rule that requires all privately owned radio and television broadcasters to air up to one hour per day of government messaging with no financial compensation. The move was condemned by press freedom advocates, and many media companies resisted complying with this rule; however, the government did not enforce this directive during 2013.

2014 Scores

Press Status

Free

Press Freedom Score

(0 = best, 100 = worst)

25

(0 = best, 30 = worst)

6

(0 = best, 40 = worst)

11

(0 = best, 30 = worst)

8